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Demanding Rights for All

JUST TAKE ONE STEP AT A TIME, AND YOU WILL EVENTUALLY FINISH

By Akiko Mera, Executive Director, Oxfam Japan



Akiko Mera (left) and Catherine Cecil (right) from 'The Bond Girls Return'. Catherine flew in from Ukraine and Akiko from Japan to participate in the Bengaluru Trailwalker.



Nisha Agrawal, Catherine Cecil, Ammu Joseph and Akiko Mera of "The Bond Girls Return" take a break with volunteers at Checkpoint 3.

Just as there are a number of walkers, there are a number of stories to tell – that is what Trailwalker is about. It is getting to know your teammates, getting physically ready, fundraising and networking, and what you get in return is an amazing experience – one week later, here is my story of taking part in the Bengaluru Trailwalker 2014. As I write, I am suffering from peeling skin from too much sun (lack of sunscreen) and a very scratchy voice from talking too much while walking.

Having organized 7 Trailwalkers myself, I know the challenges and the commitment it takes – but The Bond Girls Return have enjoyed every moment of it. Being part of a team starts with getting to know each other, setting our goals, squeezing in the practice walks in our busy schedules and in the mean time writing emails to friends and families asking them to support the cause. Our team was very diverse and geographically spread out this year – Nisha from Delhi, Ammu from Bangalore, Catherine from Kiev, and myself from Tokyo. Yet we all came together for the same cause – utilizing Facebook and emails to keep each other updated on our progress, our hopes and our plans. The excitement built up while we were preparing physically for the 100 km

challenge. One of the joys of practice – to discover something new and exciting about the cities we all live in – was quite a learning experience in itself, and reading my teammates stories took me on a virtual tour of the cities unknown to myself. At the same time, I must admit reading everyone's practice episodes kept a bit of pressure on me, having not been out on the practice walks as much as I would have liked to. For me, cold weather was one excuse, and being busy at work was another, but reading about the excursions of my teammates motivated even this procrastinator and gave me the energy to get out there and walk whenever possible. What does that mean in practical terms? – no elevators or escalators, walk to and from work if possible, and being creative to get that walking in as much as possible! After all, I couldn't rely on gym machines – that would be too much of a controlled environment, and sometimes too comfortable!

Another challenge and joy of Trailwalker is the fundraising – I sensitized my friends by sending them a New Year's card with several photos from last year's walk, together with a message that read "I'm doing it again! Join me for the adventure!" Emails and Facebook posts soon followed to give people a

"gentle reminder." What is amazing (and amusing!) is what this brings – it brings back friends, including former college room mates, professors, neighbours, former bosses, ex-boyfriends and everyone else you can imagine all back in your life! People were thrilled that they too could take part in the fun and adventure by supporting our team. They liked the story, and they liked the cause behind it. Many of them have sent messages throughout the weekend to cheer us on – sorry I could not answer them all. Going into the event our team was quite excited – being on the leaderboard for fundraising meant other teams recognized us for what we had been able to accomplish so far. Beware! We will continue to write emails and ask for further support until the close of the fundraising deadline!

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Wonders of Trailwalker – the scenes from the Bengaluru Trailwalker are quite different from what the city is usually known for – India’s IT hub. The trail takes you through fields where you will see tree after tree of mango (my favourite fruit), coconut – which sometimes will quench your thirst, as well as the nice aroma of eucalyptus giving you a subtly refreshed feeling along the way. Cows and bulls with uniquely decorated and colored horns and bells are a familiar scene on the trail at this time of the year, as Trailwalker takes place immediately after *Mattu Pongal*, a celebration for cows. Cows play a vital role in harvesting affecting people’s lives. Along with goats, silk cocoons, and bright red chilies being dried on the side of the trail, these were yet another familiar scene during Trailwalker. A large banyan tree gave

relief from the heat, with plenty of space to rest, perhaps even an opportunity to chat with villagers or other teams. Needless to say, it is a great way to get a glimpse of people’s lives here. Along the way, villagers pointed us to the right direction, while students tried to practice their newly learned English and greet us.

But I know sometimes it can come with pain – for some people that means blisters, cramped legs, fighting with sleep deprivation, and/or just plain fatigue. All of this may hit you or your teammates from time to time. So what do you do? Just take one step at a time, and you will eventually finish.

Currently there are 16 Trailwalkers in 11 different countries. Trailwalkers around the world share the same rules, and work for the same cause –

to raise funds for Oxfam’s work. Since Trailwalker started in 1981, many people have taken on the challenge. In 2012, over 22,000 people collectively walked over 2.2 million km and raised over \$18 million around the world. If you have not tried it yet, why don’t you sign up and become part of this global challenge? You might find the walker in you and the whole experience will give you more than getting fit for the walk – it will open your eyes to many things that we take for granted – families, friends, supporters, beautiful scenery, a strong determination to accomplish something, and our belief in social justice. By joining, we will also become ambassadors for Oxfam’s work. If you are looking for a different adventure, temples and Mt. Fuji will await you at the Oxfam Japan Trailwalker, which begins on May 16.

TEAM SPIRIT GALORE IN OXFAM INDIA TRAILWALKER IN BENGALURU

‘Every Mile Counts’ Finishes First In Bangalore Trailwalker 2014

The fourth edition of Oxfam India Trailwalker that was held in Bengaluru from 24 to 26 January 2014 successfully completed with lots of cheers and enthusiasm.

‘Every Mile Counts’, a team from Goldman Sachs, was the winning team which reached the final checkpoint in Bidadi in the evening of Day 1. The team completed the challenge of walking together the 100 kms trail in the short span of 15 hours, 02 minutes and 48 seconds. The team winners were Vaishali Kasture, Manoj Varma, Jagmohan Bisht, and Ankush Dixit. The team that reached second was ‘Strolling Thunders’ which completed the 100 km walk in 19 hours, 16 minutes and 22 seconds. They were also the fastest all-male team. The third fastest team ‘Shankara Pathfinders’ finished this challenge in 19 hours, 58 minutes and 39 seconds.

No. of Teams Started - 188
No. of Walkers Started - 748
No. of Teams Completed - 180
No. of Walkers Completed - 642



Every Mile Counts (GS), Fastest Team of Oxfam India Trailwalker 2014, Bengaluru felicitated by runner and social activist Milind Soman

The fundraising target this year is **Rs 3.5 crores**, out of which, the teams have already raised more than **Rs 1.5 crores**. The last date for fundraising is 27 February 2014.

This fourth edition of Oxfam India’s Trailwalker, had immense support from

corporate houses such as **Goldman Sachs, Accenture, Weir Group, TESCO, Thomson Reuters, Infinite Computer Solutions**, some of who not only participated in the event, but also came forward to volunteer at many of the checkpoints along the route.

RURAL CRÈCHES ADDRESSING INFANTS' MALNUTRITION ISSUES: CHHATTISGARH STATE GOVERNMENT ADAPTS THE MODEL

"I feel very reassured now when I leave my kid at the creche in my village. I can now work in peace and earn some money to give my child a good future. My child is in safe hands. He was underweight when he was born. But thanks to the Phulwari programme, he got nutritious care and is now getting back to normal," says Shanti, mother of 8 month old Vivek.

Shanti is not the only mother who has benefited immensely from the village-based crèche programme called Phulwari, initiated in 2006 by Oxfam India's partner Jan Swasthya Sahyog (JSS) in Bilaspur district in Chhattisgarh.

Phulwari was set up with the dual aim of improving the hugely prevalent under-nutrition of children under 3 years of age and also to support the parents who work in the forests.

As part of the programme, these village-based crèches are being run in 81 villages.

The existing government scheme of Aanganwadi catered only to the nutritional needs of 3-6 year old children. On the other hand, Phulwari is a crèche service providing not only nutritious food but also day care.

Each child gets 100 gm of rice, 20 gm daal, 5 ml oil, 60 gm sattu per day and 2 boiled eggs twice a week. The aim of the programme is to improve the much required physical, immunologic and neuro-developmental growth potential of these children.

Other than their children becoming healthier, parents have given a thumbs up to these crèches since it has been the perfect solution for yet another one of their primary needs of child care when they go out to work.

"I can work now without worrying, I am happy that my child is well fed at the crèche, not just rice and wheat, but wholesome and nutritious food. I used to rush back home from work to attend to my child. I was always so concerned



Children sleeping in comfort under a mosquito net in a Phulwari.

about his health but simply couldn't feed him at the right time. But now I am happy as children at the centre are given one cooked meal and two snacks of a high protein-high energy mixture called 'sattu' during the five to six hours that they are here for. More recently, children are being provided with an egg two days a week. The Phulwari is also equipped with toys to stimulate learning," says a beaming Nirmala.

These rural crèches piloted by JSS in tribal areas of Bilaspur district have set an example. The experiment of running more than 81 crèches in tribal villages has shown that a marked improvement in the nutrition status of children is possible through such an intervention.

Taking a cue from this, the Chhattisgarh government has adapted the Phulwari community crèche model of JSS and launched the 'Phulwari Scheme' for children between 6 months and 3 years. The scheme's aim is curbing malnutrition.

According to the information from State Health Resource Centre, in the first phase, the scheme will be implemented in 85 tribal development blocks in 19 districts, with 2,850 Phulwari centres. Pregnant women, lactating mothers, infants and children will get balanced, nutritious and hot meals every day,

besides medical attention and other care at these centres.

The government has allocated an amount of Rs 10 crore for setting up these crèches. At present, 300 Phulwari centres are functioning in Sarguja district. The remaining will come up in the current financial year.

Ramabai, age 38 years, from Jhingatpur, Kota Block, Bilaspur district has been working as a crèche worker since it was first set up 7 years ago. She is currently taking care of 22 children with the help of her mother. Though uneducated, Ramabai has received training from JSS on the children's diet and other hygiene related aspects. In the Phulwari model, the caretakers are from the same village. This ensures that the parents are at ease leaving their child in a known person's care. The second benefit is that if a child has some health issue, the caretaker herself contacts the Village Health Worker who does the needful by prescribing medicines. The child's parents are told about the course of medication.

Phulwari managed by JSS has been a success story in a state where healthcare and the nutrition issues of children between 6 months to 3 years of age has been an immense concern.

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85 RICHEST PEOPLE OWN THE SAME WEALTH AS HALF THE WORLD'S POPULATION

Wealthy elites have co-opted political power to rig the rules of the economic game, undermining democracy and creating a world where the 85 richest people own the wealth of half of the world's population, worldwide development organisation Oxfam warns in a report.

Working for the Few, released in World Economic Forum in Davos, details the pernicious impact that widening inequality is having in both developed and developing countries, helping the richest undermine democratic processes and drive policies that promote their interests at the expense of everyone else.

The report says that there is growing global public awareness of this power-grab. Polls done for Oxfam in six countries (Brazil, India, South Africa, Spain, the UK and US) show that most people questioned in all those countries believed that laws were skewed in favour of the rich.

The building of India's billionaires

India has seen its number of billionaires

increase from less than 6 to 61 in the past decade, concentrating approximately \$250 bn among a few dozen people in a country of 1.2 billion. What is striking is the share of the country's wealth held by this elite minority, which skyrocketed from 1.8 per cent in 2003 to 26 per cent in 2008, though it declined in the aftermath of the global financial crisis.

Nisha Agrawal, CEO of Oxfam India says, "At the time of India's Independence, our founders dreamt of creating an equal opportunity country. Today, the reality is far from the dream and we are moving further and further away from becoming a land where everyone has the same opportunity to move ahead in life to one where existing and already large inequalities are getting widened and deepened due to the kind of development path we are on, where opportunities exist only for a handful of those already privileged."

By some estimates, half of India's billionaires acquired their wealth in 'rent thick' sectors. This means

sectors where profits are dependent on access to scarce resources, made available exclusively through government permissions and therefore susceptible to corruption by powerful actors – as opposed to creation of wealth. Such sectors include real estate, construction, mining, and telecommunications.

Despite incredible economic gains by a few dozen people in India, poverty and inequality remain rampant. While the number of billionaires has multiplied by ten, government spending on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable groups in society remains remarkably low.

For example, India's public spending on healthcare is just 1 per cent of GDP. The Asian Development Bank's recently released report on assessing country expenditure on poor and economically vulnerable groups ranked India 23 out of 35 countries in the region. Even among the 19 low- to middle-income countries, India ranked in the bottom half, in twelfth place.

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